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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN; NEW DELHI.

This countrywide cable reports on relevant media reaction/opinion from India's large non-English press. The Mission reports on English-language media via email through the daily "Early Edition" summary.

PAKISTAN

11. "HERE'S THE ANSWER," editorial in the March 16 nationalist RASHTRIYA SAHARA Hindi daily: "Pakistan sent 30 questions earlier in March on the Mumbai attack, and on Friday India gave 32 answers which included more than 400 pages in all, as well as CDs, intercepted voice recordings and voice logs. The ball is now back in Pakistan's court. Home Minister P. Chidambaram is right when he says that this body of evidence is sufficient for anyone who wishes to investigate in full and with seriousness. But the question is, how honest is Pakistan going to be? India should not hurry; rather, we should wait patiently for Pakistan to give a response. But with the current turmoil in Pakistan, it looks unlikely that Pakistan will answer in a hurry."

12. "PAKISTAN AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE," op-ed article in the March 16 right-of-center DAINIK JAGRAN Hindi daily by Security and defense expert C. Uday Bhaskar: "All sorts of contradictory news coming from Islamabad -- the U.S. is putting pressure on President Zardari to reach an agreement with Sharif, the army could oust democracy once again, etc. -- is aggravating the ongoing political

turmoil there. Zardari's conflicts with Prime Minister Gilani and the army Chief General Kiyani also indicate that this crisis should end as soon as possible. The political division and the narrow interests of the political parties are the reasons behind the problems in Swat and on the Western border. They have weakened the roots of democracy and given the army the opportunity to rule. Everybody has their eyes on General Kiyani. If the Pakistani army remains neutral, a ray of hope could emerge from the PML(N)'s demonstration of power and Zardari's isolation in the PPP. Expressing disagreement and political dissent without using violence is a fundamental element of a healthy democracy. Pakistan should be encouraged to follow it."

13. "TOWARDS THE NEXT CRISIS," editorial in the March 17 independent Kolkata Bengali daily, ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA. "Whether it (the Pakistan situation) is the forecast of a severe storm remains a matter of speculation. First, the extent of flexibility that President Zardari has shown makes it harder for him to retain his position. Nawaz Sharif is clearly keen on grabbing power in the near future. This makes the power tussle between the two political parties and their leaders even more intense. Second, Prime Minister Gilani is now the closest associate of the Army Chief Kiyani... while Sharif is backed by a large section of the civil society, the Pakistani army and possibly the U.S. stand by Gilani. If the Chief Justice, following his reinstatement, really does revive Musharraf's trial process, it may antagonize

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the Army. And lastly, it would be an oversimplification to think that the Pakistan Army stands fully united. The pro-U.S. and pro-terrorist divisions in the Army will become stronger than ever before. This may spell danger for the entire world. The country's situation is literally explosive."

14. "ZARDARI COMPROMISES TO RETAIN HIS CHAIR," editorial in the March 17 pro-BJP Kolkata Bengali daily, BARTAMAN. "Democracy's victory on Pakistani soil cautions Zardari on one hand and sends out a signal to the Army on the other that democracy must be sustained in the country. U.S. President Obama's firmness worked in this. America has become disillusioned about Zardari after his compromise with the Taliban. So, the U.S. appropriately advised General Kiyani in order to put pressure on Zardari. Consequently, Kiyani reins in Zardari through Gilani. America wants to accomplish its goals by helping sustain democracy in Pakistan."

15. "WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PAKISTAN'S CRISIS", editorial in the March 16 right-of-center Urdu daily SIASAT, Hyderabad: "Pakistan is on the verge of ruin. The administration of the country has ground to a halt, and dirty linens are being aired along the roads. Clashes between the government and Nawaz Sharif are taking a disastrous shape. Every party wants their vested interest served instead of working to alleviate the grievous situation. The prevailing circumstances show that Zardari is trampling the supremacy of law and the constitution, while on the other hand, Nawaz Sharif wants to capture power by hook or by crook. This is causing apprehension that the army may intervene once again. If it happens, democracy will be rooted out from the country forever, and Pakistan will be branded a failed state. Responsibility will fall directly on Asif Ali Zardari and indirectly on Nawaz Sharif."

16. "CHAOS IN PAKISTAN, ONCE AGAIN", editorial in the March 16 right-of-center Urdu daily URDU TIMES, Mumbai: "The very recently established democracy in Pakistan is facing chaos and anarchy once again. Foreign countries like America and Britain are concerned that the chaotic conditions in Pakistan may escalate terrorist activities.

That is why, along with the Pakistani army, they have warned the Zardari government to control the situation immediately. In other words, the sword of the Pakistani army is hanging once again over the heads of Pakistan and Zardari. Apart from that, the USA and Britain have also instructed Zardari to mend relations with Nawaz Sharif and reinstate the dismissed judges or be forced to abandon power. Pakistan's politicians realize that their regime has a short time to live, and the army can capture the government at any time, but in spite of that they do not cooperate with each other. Chaos in Pakistan is not injurious to itself only; it is also harmful for the entire world, particularly India, its neighbor. Angry unemployed youth in an instable Pakistan may become easy prey to terrorist organizations, increasing dangers for countries throughout the region."

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17. "A COMPROMISE IN PAKISTAN" editorial in the March 17, 2009, Mumbai edition of centrist Marathi daily NAVASHAKTI. "The immediate political crisis in Pakistan seems to have been averted after the restoration of the dismissed Chief Justice. However, this is a compromise by President Zardari, who had gone back on his promise of reinstating Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, fired by former President Pervez Musharraf in 2007. Zardari gave in only after the army chief categorically warned him, and when Zardari witnessed his political rival Nawaz Sharif actively supporting the lawyers' agitation. Albeit too late, Zardari has now realized the popular voice against his government. This incident also signals the emergence of Sharif, the leader in waiting. Although the path ahead remains unclear and messy for both Zardari and Sharif, the reinstatement of the Chief Justice serves a purpose. The chief justice might now let courts reopen past corruption cases and human rights abuses. In this way a strong and independent judiciary might stabilize Pakistan, contain its corrupt leadership and also resist the siren call of the Jihadi elements..." Similar editorials appeared in Marathi dailies LOKMAT and SAKAAL of the same date.

18. "DEMOCRACY WINS, ZARDARI LOSES IN PAKISTAN" editorial in the March 17, 2009 multi-edition centrist Gujarati daily DIVYA BHASKAR. "At last, Zardari succumbed to the pressure and accepted most of the demands of his political bete noire Nawaz Sharif.... This episode reveals that Zardari has proved to be a fragile player in the politics of Pakistan. Zardari's calculations, cutting Nawaz Sharif down to size by having the Supreme court disqualify both Sharif brothers from contesting elections, have boomeranged on him. The political acumen with which Nawaz Sharif turned the tables on Zardari has not only made him a hero but also done colossal damage to Zardari's image. Besides, this also suggests the victory of democracy in Pakistan. Although the circumstances were ripe for the army to stage a coup and acquire power, it refrained from doing so. Only democracy can ensure a safe future for Pakistan." A similar editorial appeared in the March 17, 2009 multi-edition right-of-center Gujarati daily GUJARAT SAMACHAR.

AFGHANISTAN

19. "PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN", editorial in the March 16 right-of-center Urdu daily HAMARA SAMAJ, New Delhi: "The United Nations Organization has expressed its deep concern over delays in Presidential elections in Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan is most explosive due to political instability and anarchy. Free and fair elections should be held in an environment where freedom of expression, of the media, and of the people to gather are guaranteed. Rebel Taliban extremists will try

to sabotage the proposed election. They do not want the new government as a puppet government playing into the hands of America. Elections in Afghanistan under the supervision of international soldiers cannot be

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successful. The strategy rebel Afghan leaders and extremists elements of the Taliban will adopt during the election cannot be predicted at this moment. One can only speculate. Elections could be free, fair and transparent under the supervision of international armed forces, provided rebel Afghan leaders agree to cooperate. How things will go won't become clear before June."

WHITE